



SOUTH SHROPSHIRE ACADEMY TRUST



Complaints Procedure

FREQUENCY OF REVIEW:	Every two years
COMMITTEE:	Local Governing Board
APPROVED:	May 2021
AUTHOR:	Headteacher
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	Spring Term 2023 Unless there is a material change

This complaints procedure is for parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Additionally others, may make a complaint to Church Stretton School about provision of facilities or services that the school provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Church Stretton School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. You should express your concern to the relevant member of staff OR the head teacher. You can do this by phoning the school office on 01694 722209 or contacting admin@cssschool.co.uk

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the head teacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Church Stretton School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the head teacher) should be made in the first instance, to Mr John Parr, head teacher via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the head teacher should be addressed to Mr Mike Collison (the Chair of Governors), via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. (These will be dealt with at Stage 2 part 2 of the complaints procedure).

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to Mrs Zoe Keeling (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Please note that our complaints procedure is for us as a school and relates to school matters. Please contact the Trust Clerk for Trust procedures regarding Trust complaints. Telephone: 01746 760509 Email: clerk@trusted-schools.com website: www.trusted-schools.com

Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a trustee of the Trust, should be addressed to Mrs Judy Mondon Chair of Trustees, via the Trust office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. (see appendix 3)

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. (Appendix 1)

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

See footnote¹

What cannot be dealt with as a complaint

- Matters that are the responsibility of another agency or relating to a party external to the school and therefore outside of the schools' responsibility. (see Appendix 2 for details of exceptions)
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation.
- Any issue which occurred more than 3 months ago unless the school considers that:
 - a) the issue could still be effectively and fairly investigated and
 - b) it would not have been reasonable to expect you to make the complaint within those 3 months.
- Complaints about other organisations using the school premises.
- Complaints which have already been dealt with by our Complaints Procedure, or where there is undue repetition of a very similar complaint that has already been dealt with.
- Anonymous complaints, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- Vexatious complaints.
- Additional, supplementary additions and alterations to complaints mid-process.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Church Stretton School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint

¹ In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with either the class teacher, year head / subject head or head teacher. Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 part 2 of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint

Part 1

Formal complaints must be made to the head teacher (unless they are about the head teacher), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (see optional complaints form).

The head teacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Within this response, the head teacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The head teacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The head teacher may delegate the investigation to another senior staff member but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the head teacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the head teacher will provide a formal written response within 15 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the head teacher is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Church Stretton School will take to resolve the complaint.

The head teacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 part 1.

If the complaint is about the head teacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2 part 2.

Complaints about the head teacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 3 will be undertaken by the CEO of the Trust (see Appendix 3)

Part 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 part 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 part 2 – then it should be addressed to the Chair of Governors.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 part 2 must be made to the Chair of Governors at Church Stretton School via the school office within 15 days of receipt of the Stage 2 part 1 response.

In your letter to the Chair of Governors you will need to include details of your complaint and why you were dissatisfied by the earlier response(s) to your complaint.

The Chair of Governors will:

- ensure that we acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 school days of receipt;
- respond to your complaint in writing to you within 15 school days. This may involve an offer of a meeting with you if appropriate;
- let you know if your complaint will take longer than 15 school days and why;

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Church Stretton School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Chair of Governors will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 part 2.

If the complaint is about the head teacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2 part 2.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 parts 1 and 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel

member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 part 2 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 3 will be heard by trustees and an independent panel member (see also Appendix 3)

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under (Human Resources) staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend and all present will be asked to switch off any mobile or recording devices.

At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with as a new complaint.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Church Stretton School with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Church Stretton School.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Church Stretton School will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school / trust did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by TrustEd Schools' Partnership. They will consider whether Church Stretton School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

Guidance

Guidance on roles and responsibilities including role of Chairs for a panel hearing can be obtained on request from the Trust Office. Tel: 01746 760509 Email: clerk@trusted-schools.com

Appendix 1:

Optional Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Church Stretton School

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Appendix 2:

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Church Stretton School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions to schools	Concerns about admissions should be handled through a separate process – either through the appeals process or via the local authority.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding. LADO c/o HR Department, Shropshire Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exclusion of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions .
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concerns raised by Staff.	Staff should refer to the relevant policy eg: Whistleblowing policy. Details can be obtained through Headteacher, or school office or the Trust Office.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a complainant commences legal action against Church Stretton School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Appendix 3:

Matters dealt with through the Trust complaints process

For complaints that are regarding the Trust rather than Church Stretton School the following process is in place. Contact Trust Office Tel: 01746 760509 Email: clerk@trusted-schools.com

For a complaint directly about the trust, then the complaint should be sent to the CEO to be investigated.

The CEO will write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint within 5 school days of the date that the written request was received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint will now be investigated under Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy and will confirm the date for providing a response to the complainant.

Following the investigation, the CEO will write to the complainant confirming the outcome within 15 school days of the date that the letter was received. If this time limit cannot be met, the CEO will write to the Complainant within 5 school days of the date that the letter was received, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date.

If the complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the complaint should be investigated by the Chair of the Trust Board. If a formal complaint form is received about the Chair, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Chair for investigation.

NB. Where the Chair of the Trust Board has investigated the complaint, they will write the letter of outcome to the Complainant and provide a copy to the CEO.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the previous stage, the complainant should write to the Clerk to the Trust Board asking for the complaint to be heard before a Complaint Panel, within 15 school days.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 20 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire trust board or
- the majority of the trust board

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

The Complaint Panel will consist of three members. None of the three members of the Complaint Panel will have been involved in the incidents or events which led to the complaint, or have been involved in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages, or have any detailed prior knowledge of the complaint.

One of the Complaint Panel members will be independent of the management and running of the Academy Trust. This means that the independent Complaint Panel member will not be a Trustee or an employee of the Trust.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a trust employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 7 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial

complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with as a new complaint.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
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If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and TrustEd Schools' Partnership with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by TrustEd Schools' Partnership

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions TrustEd Schools' Partnership will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential, except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

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The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by us. They will consider whether we have adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The complainant can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

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